



## Research Article

## The extent of engagement in art making and exhibition by art therapy practitioners and students



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## ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to delineate how art therapists define their professional identity, as well as the extent and way that their artist identities are implemented. Participants included art therapy practitioners ( $N = 59$ ) and art therapy students ( $N = 181$ ). They participated in a survey, which had been developed to investigate their views on the identity, approaches, necessity of art work, work contents, and exhibitions. The results of the survey are as follows: (a) Respondents said that the role of art therapists is most similar to that of psychotherapists, but they also acknowledge the importance of the artist's identity. (b) There was a slight preference for "art psychotherapy" over "art as therapy." (c) Art therapists who continued to create artwork and host art exhibitions were valued highly. (d) The materials used for the artists' personal art projects had much in common with the materials commonly used for art therapy sessions. (e) Among the various reasons for art therapists' inactivity regarding exhibitions, the most common answer was that their art works were not optimized for exhibiting. (f) Respondents preferred group exhibitions as their exhibition method, followed by virtual exhibition. These results lend weight to the view that art therapists have an artistic identity in their heart, but it might be considered secondary.

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## Introduction

The long-standing debate on what counts as art has continued since the beginning of the art therapy field in relation to art therapists' identities and roles. Although "art as therapy" and "art psychotherapy" are not contradictory terms, they appear to refer to two different domains. The former reminds us of an art educator who values the artistic process, while the latter evokes the image of a psychoanalyst who tries to interpret the expressions and symbols represented in a painting. Similarly, the "studio approach," considering the role of art as a major part of the therapeutic process, and the "clinical approach," using art as a non-verbal expressive tool, appear to be in conflict (McGraw, 1995). However, regardless of one's position on either approach, many art therapists hold a belief that the spirit of art therapy originated from art.

It is not uncommon to find people who self-identify as both art therapist and artist. One such outstanding figure is Edith Kramer (1971), an art therapy pioneer, who identified herself as a practicing artist and educator and emphasized that the essence of art therapy is in making art. Other well-known figures include Don Jones,

Robert Ault, Helen Landgarten, Shaun McNiff, Mildred Lachman-Chapin, and Maxine Junge, all of whom are both exhibiting artists and art therapists (Junge & Wadson, 2006). In her book *Studio Art Therapy*, Moon (2002) stressed that art therapists should self-identify as artists. She expressed a deep concern about art therapists who abandon their original creative activities due to competition with and the influence of neighboring fields. Moon believed that the one unique feature of art therapists is their work in which they create art.

However, the emphasis on art work became looser when art therapists became members of the professional mental health field. Instead, focus was on understanding the treatment process, therapeutic techniques, clinical interviews, assessments, case formulations, and documentation. Furthermore, the professionals in this field have paid greater attention to therapists' qualifications, licensure, and their contribution to psychology and brain research (Good, 1993; Good & Sly-Linton, 1995; Lusebrink, 2004; Webster, 1994). The fact that the importance of art itself is weakened is also true for art therapy clients, which parallels the state of art therapists. The appearance of "clinification syndrome" (Allen, 1992; p. 22) may have been the result of art therapists starting to merely use art as a means of attaining therapeutic goals. If a client's work is used as testimony for their symptoms or as a test response that allows therapists to explore psychological problems, both the client

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and the art therapist are far removed from the essence of art. On the opposite side of clinification syndrome, there are art therapists who place a greater emphasis on artist identity. For instance, when art therapist Don Jones is asked whether he was an artist or a therapist, he always replies that “I am an artist,” which has never changed in nearly thirty years (Moon, 2003; p. 53).

Art therapy, a hybrid discipline interwoven with both *art* and *therapy*, inevitably has addressed a dual identity issue (Aldridge, 1993; Feen-Calligan, 2012; Lachman-Chapin, 1993b; Orkibi, 2010). The question concerning art therapists' identity has changed over time from “Are you an artist or a therapist?” to “Are you an art therapist or a counselor?” (Feen-Calligan, 2012; p. 150).

Professional identity is important to those who provide mental health services, such as art therapists, counselors, and psychotherapists (Nelson & Jackson, 2003). Professional identity comes from a subjective assessment in which an individual thinks of himself as a professional and in order to become a profession, the occupation must have specificity and uniqueness of work (Kim, 2001; Hahn, 1998). Feen-Calligan (2012) defined professional identity as “both the collective identity of the profession held by members of the profession and individual's sense of self within the professional role.” (p. 150). There are several studies which show that the stronger one's professional identity is, the less one experiences burnout (Ahn, 2000; Butler & Constantine, 2005; Yu, 2008). In a study with school counselors, group self-esteem had a negative correlation with emotional depletion (Butler & Constantine, 2005). In the case of social workers, people with strong professional identities reported less burnout even under highly stressful situations (Oh, 2005). Yu (2008) reported that job satisfaction of counselors affected counselor burnout through the mediation of collective self-esteem. Kim and Yu (2010) examined the relationship between professional identity, role conflict, and burnout in 223 school counselors and they found that professional identity did not correlate with role conflict, but it negatively correlated with burnout. Orkibi (2010) reported arts therapies students' professional identities are positively correlated with career commitment. As such, there seems to be a positive relationship between professional identity and job performances, especially in regards to the mental health professionals' burnout rates and job satisfaction.

Another important issue specifically related to professional identity of art therapists is pursuing artwork. Since the debate over the role of art in art therapy in the mid-1990s (Lachman-Chapin, 1993b; Lachman-Chapin et al., 1998), the emphasis on creating personal art was continued by art therapists who mentioned the benefits of art therapists' personal art making and the dangers of not doing so (Allen, 1992; Brown, 2008; Cahn, 2000; Iliya, 2014; Wix, 1996). According to Brown (2008), benefits include developing a sense of connection to the profession as well as providing inspiration. She asserts that “therapists' engagement in their own art making is essential to one's clinical work, career satisfaction, and skills,” (p. 202) and that it is “vital to their professional affectivity and their personal well-being” (p. 207). On the other hand, if art therapists choose to forego regular art making, possible pitfall would include career drift, stress, burnout, and clinification syndrome (Allen, 1992). Cahn (2000) also warned that clinification syndrome could occur if artwork is neglected in art therapy. All these claims are based on the art therapists' own personal insights and educational experiences; however, research based on empirical data is relatively scarce. Orkibi (2010) surveyed arts therapies students in Israel and found that 82.4% of respondents considered it important to engage in artistic activity during their graduate program. When asked about personal artistic activities outside of class, the percentage of respondents who affirmed that they took part in such activities reduced to 66.2%. Orkibi (2012) also conducted qualitative study to investigate creative arts therapies students' artistic experience, and reported that “during training, most stu-

dents refrained from personal art making outside of training due to lack of time and money.” (p. 428). Deaver (2012) stated that she was surprised to find 35% of art therapy educators denied the possibility of personal art making as a thesis focus. Brown (2008) stated that in her 12 years of experience, she found that many students and colleagues did not keep up personal art making on a regular basis. An interesting result from Orkibi's research (2016) contradicts the common belief regarding the benefits of art making; that is, engaging in artistic activity did not affect burnout or career commitment. This unexpected finding calls for future research to examine art therapy students and practitioners' art making in a more detailed fashion “instead of a yes-no response format” (Orkibi, 2016; p. 81).

Therefore, this paper will survey art therapy students and practitioners about their thoughts on professional identity and their activities regarding personal art making, using detailed and specific questions. In this study, we surveyed Korean art therapists and art therapy students to elaborate upon those questions. Detailed information on Korean art therapists' professional identity and artistic engagement would contribute to establishing a collective identity of art therapy in a globalized era.

## Method

### Survey design

The content of the questionnaire was produced on the basis of interviews with seven art therapists, who also teach and supervise art therapy students. Since there was a scarcity of survey questionnaires with this theme, we decided to create a questionnaire investigating the meaning of art work based on our experiences and relevant articles. The participants were asked to freely brainstorm the most appropriate questions to include.

With regard to the format of questions, the majority of the participants preferred multiple choice questions to simple yes-no questions in order to yield diverse opinions. We decided to use multiple choice questions combined with a choice of free description, so that we could organize results easily and give survey respondents opportunities to answer freely.

As for the question content, people suggested including abstract concepts and attitudes, as well as concrete activities. When we were discussing what to ask concerning concrete art making activities, some participants held the view that it would be appropriate to ask how many hours per week people dedicated to personal art making; however, this opinion was countered by others who doubted the effectiveness of such data. Rather, questions were posed about what kind of material is used for the art work in order to estimate the diversity of artwork. In recent years in Korea, there has been a growing interest in art materials used in art therapy sessions (Gu, Lee, & Kim, 2016; Hwang & Kim, 2010; Kim & Kim, 2011; Song & Kim, 2012). Therefore, it would be interesting to explore what kind of art materials do art therapists choose for their personal art making. Art materials can be categorized into either a flat medium or a three-dimensional medium, so we decided to ask questions accordingly. Depending on the characteristics of the materials used, we decided to present some sample choices and also provide an opportunity to describe the respondents' own material choice.

Questions concerning art exhibitions were included in order to estimate the seriousness of personal art making. According to Lachman-Chapin (1993b), serious artists need to exhibit, sell their works, and be evaluated by critics. Among these activities, questioning about art exhibition was suggested by the three professors in the discussion group who taught art therapy students. They said that recently there were more art therapy graduates' exhibitions than before and that their school also held graduation exhibitions. From their experiences of preparing the exhibitions with students,

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